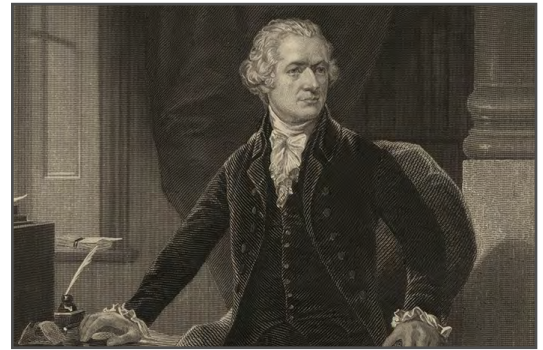


# ALEXANDER HAMILTON

Have you ever used a \$10 bill, visited an American bank, or studied the United States Constitution? Then, you have encountered, to some extent, the influence of Alexander Hamilton (1757-1804).

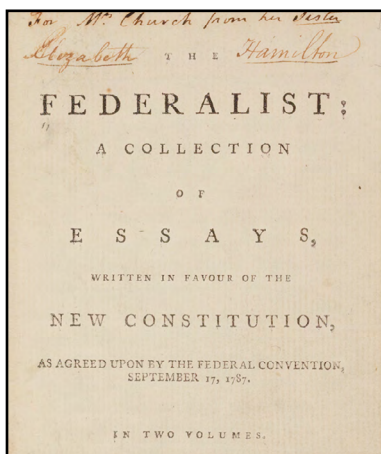


"A Hamilton from the original painting by Chappel, in the possession of the publishers."

<https://www.loc.gov/item/2008676310/>

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Indeed, this important figure in the nation's foundational years assumed numerous integral roles, many of which have had an impact on U.S. history, government, and culture. These roles include: writer, lawyer, father, husband, statesman, aide-de-camp, Treasury secretary, and in many ways, an individual



**The federalist : a collection of essays, written in favour of the new Constitution, as agreed upon by the Federal Convention, September 17, 1787 : in two volumes.**  
<https://www.loc.gov/item/09021562/>

with a keen vision for the U.S. that endures today.

Born in 1757 in what is known today as Nevis, an island in the Caribbean, Hamilton actually spent much of his adolescence in Christiansted, St. Croix, in the

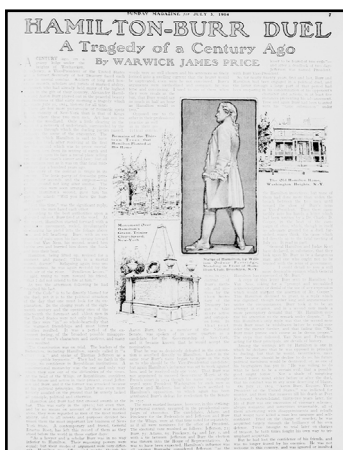
present-day U.S. Virgin Islands. Hamilton came of age in impoverished circumstances and his mother died when he was young.

From a young age, Hamilton demonstrated a passion for the written word, as his early writings demonstrate. It was a talent for writing that led him to gain sponsorship to leave St. Croix for Britain's colonies further north. Hamilton immigrated to New York, by way of Boston, Massachusetts, as a teenager in the 1770s. It would be in New York that Hamilton would meet his future wife, Elizabeth Schuyler, whom he married in 1780, and where he would spend much of his career and adult life.

Hamilton's career spanned military, political, and legal realms. For example, he served as state delegate from New York at the Continental Congress, and during the American Revolution, he served as a key military aide for George Washington, playing an important role, for

example, in the pivotal Battle of Yorktown (1781).

In 1787, Hamilton was among the state delegates who met in Philadelphia to discuss the Articles of Confederation—and ultimately, the United States Constitution. During this Constitutional Convention, on June 18, 1787, he delivered a speech to the delegates in which he shared his “Plan of Government.”



“Hamilton-Burr Duel, A Tragedy of a Century Ago.”

<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1904-07-03/ed-1/seq-32/>

Although there is no transcript of the speech, Hamilton did compose a detailed outline and notes. At the end of the meeting, in September 1787, 39 of 42 delegates approved the Constitution, which was subsequently sent to the states for approval.

In a campaign to gain the support of the people of New York for the Constitution, Hamilton, alongside James Madison and John Jay, wrote 85 essays in support of the document—a collection that is now known as *The Federalist* or the Federalist Papers. These essays were published in two newspapers in New York using the pseudonym “Publius,” beginning in October 1787. The Constitution was finally ratified in June 1788.

Among Hamilton’s later contributions to, and influences on, the nation, he played an important role as the first secretary of the Department of the Treasury. As secretary, he was a strong advocate for institutions that included a national bank and a mint.

Hamilton also helped found one of America’s earliest political parties, the Federalist Party, which supported a central government, American manufacturing and industry, and separate government branches. Of

course, there was opposition to these positions—including from other members of the founding generation, like Thomas Jefferson. Opponents asserted, for example, that a central government could not be sustained and also pressed the significance of a largely agrarian economy, as well as the rights of common people.

In 1804, Hamilton was challenged to a duel by a longtime political opponent, U.S. vice president Aaron Burr. Hamilton died on July 12, 1804, one day after being shot by Burr in that ultimately fatal meeting. Despite his untimely death, Hamilton’s legacy and his role in the shaping of various areas of American government, civics, and society live on, and continue to be subjects of debate, revision, and discussion.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

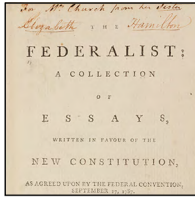
Ask students to identify a primary source that reflects Alexander Hamilton's views or actions related to a key issue, such as the debate between the Federalists and anti-Federalists, the establishment of a national bank, or the role of industry in the new nation. What do they discover from the primary source that is not as evident in a secondary account? As a follow up, students can compare Hamilton's views with the ways in which these matters have evolved since his time. In what ways, if any, has Hamilton's vision been realized and preserved?

Allow your students to select a visual depiction of Alexander Hamilton and ask them to analyze it and compare their analysis to a classmate's. What is similar about the two depictions – style, content, or technique? What is different? What characteristics do the artists seek to convey? How do the illustrations support or contradict what they know or have learned about Hamilton? As time allows, invite students to create their own depiction of Hamilton and ask them to explain the characteristics of Hamilton they sought to convey.

Select a visual depiction and a written account of a historical event or episode – for example, the Battle at Yorktown, the fatal duel, or the Constitutional Convention, and ask students to compare them. Invite your students to compare the portrayals and discuss similarities and differences. What factors might they attribute these differences to?

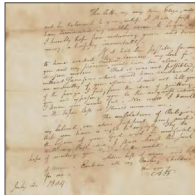
Ask students to select a depiction of Hamilton from his lifetime and a more recent depiction, either from this set or elsewhere. Invite them to explore how perceptions of Alexander Hamilton have evolved or shifted over time, whether as a result of societal or political shifts or trends, new academic scholarship, or developments in pop culture. How can they explain these changes in perception?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



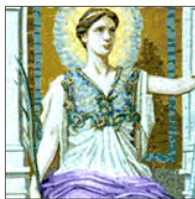
### The Federalist Papers

<https://www.congress.gov/resources/display/content/The+Federalist+Papers>



### The Alexander Hamilton Papers at the Library of Congress

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/alexander-hamilton-papers/about-this-collection/>



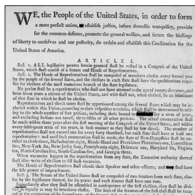
### A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lawhome.html>



### Creating the United States Constitution

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/creating-the-united-states-constitution.html>



### The Constitution

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/constitution/>

## PRIMARY SOURCES WITH CITATIONS



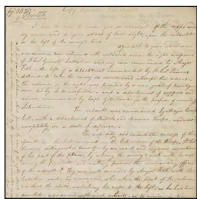
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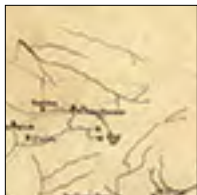
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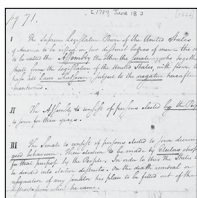
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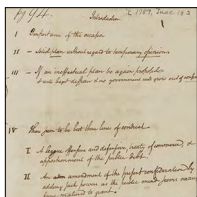
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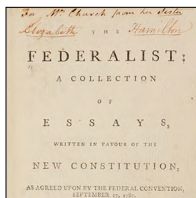
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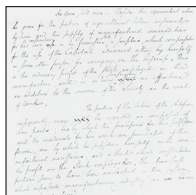
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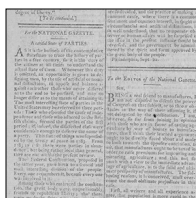
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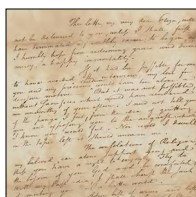
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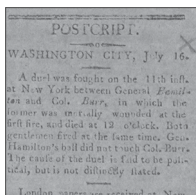
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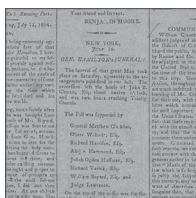
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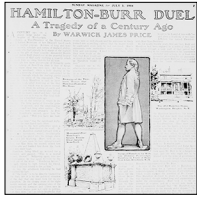
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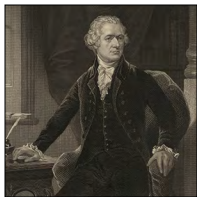
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